

**EL TORO TRAIL
ACCESS STRATEGY**

PROJECT BACKGROUND

El Toro Mountain is located in the eastern foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains and provides the familiar west side backdrop for the City of Morgan Hill. It is one of the most visible landmarks in Morgan Hill with its silhouette marking the City's official logo. It has long been a hiking destination for local Morgan Hill residents and for years the Morgan Hill Historical Society sponsored an annual community hike to the summit which brought hundreds of hikers at a time wanting to enjoy the beautiful vistas and gain a better understanding of the history and geology of the area.

The Open Space Authority recently purchased a hillside parcel on the southerly flank of El Toro Mountain for the purpose of expanding their open space inventory and to provide a trail for all users that could easily connect to a trail system on El Toro. At this time, none of the Open Space property is open to the public.

Recognizing the need for a City-wide trails master plan, the City Council commissioned the preparation of the ***City of Morgan Hill Trails and Natural Resources*** Study in 2007. It was officially adopted in late 2007. The study, also known as the Trails Master Plan, is intended to provide a pedestrian and bike system that will incorporate trails along creek corridors, parks, and street, and that will connect to public facilities, parks and open spaces. It is one of the guiding documents for the City to respond to the increased demands for recreational opportunities and to an awareness of the values that the surrounding natural environment provides to the growing population of the area. The Trails Master Plan goals were taken from the City's General Plan, including Goal 18, "Useful, accessible and high-quality parks, recreation and trail facilities and programs" and Action 18.1 "Actively pursue acquisition of appropriate parkland for recommended parks, trails and facilities, and to meet existing and future recreation needs".

A trail system on El Toro Mountain was included in the Trails Master Plan. While the maps and exhibits in the Plan show locations of a potential trail and potential access points, it is understood that the specifics of any portion of trail development requires proper planning before implementation. The El Toro Trail project is also consistent with the Open Space Authority's "Santa Clara Valley Greenprint," A detailed land and resource conservation vision that will guide the Authority's work over the next 30 years.

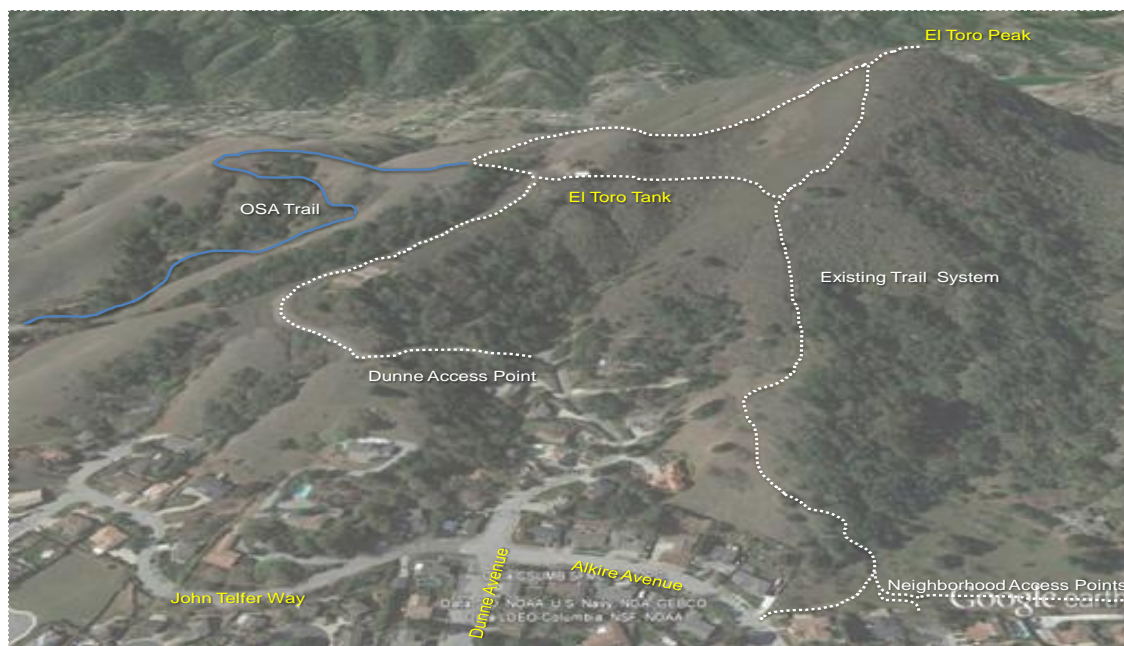
In 2010, the City Council approved the purchase of an 18-acre hillside parcel, known as the Acton property, for the purpose of expanding open space on El Toro Mountain, preventing future development of that parcel, and to provide a trail opportunity for the citizens of Morgan Hill. As a part of that purchase agreement, a trail access easement was acquired at the westerly terminus of Via Grande Drive. The easement is accessible from the end of Via Grande, a public roadway, and crosses private property retained by the sellers of the Acton parcel.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CITY COUNCIL ACTIONS

- City Council approved the Trails and Natural Resources Study in 2007
- City Council approved the purchase of the Acton property which provides an easement for the trail in 2010
- City Council approved TFCA grant funding for \$44,000 in 2012
- City Council approved CIP Budget for last two years in which the El Toro Trail Project is included

THE NEED FOR AN ACCESS STRATEGY

Given the community's desire to make El Toro Mountain a hiking destination and based on previous City Council direction to provide more hiking opportunities, the City's Public Works staff has been laying out a preliminary trail system on the face of El Toro. After several neighborhood and individual property owner meetings and public discussions at Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) meetings, it is clear that a multi location trail access strategy is a logical first step in developing hiking trails on El Toro. The access strategy discussed in this report will address recommended locations within the Morgan Hill community for accessing El Toro Mountain. Before opening up any trails for public use, the access points to those trails must be carefully planned with community input.



Existing Trail System

TRAIL CONVERSATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

The El Toro Trail project is currently in the planning phase and construction is not anticipated until an access strategy is approved and the access points are identified. The City first developed a conceptual trail plan for El Toro in early 2012 and then prepared a draft trail head plan for a Via Grande access. Staff shared these plans with the Via Grande neighborhood in a meeting with them in June of 2012. The meeting was productive in helping staff understand the thoughts and concerns of the residents living in that neighborhood. Those opposed to the trail project explained to staff that they are currently experiencing nuisance problems generated by people who are accessing El Toro from Via Grande. The following is a summary of the problems expressed by some of the residents at the meeting:

1. Quiet street now dealing with non-resident pedestrian traffic and increased noise
2. Concerns about non-neighborhood trail users and trail user vehicles parked on street
3. Noisy trail users in early morning and evening hours
4. Loitering at trailhead
5. Loss of residential parking, not enough trail user parking
6. Restroom accessibility
7. Potential for trail users to start fires and deter wildlife
8. Trail users leaving trash on the trail and in the neighborhood

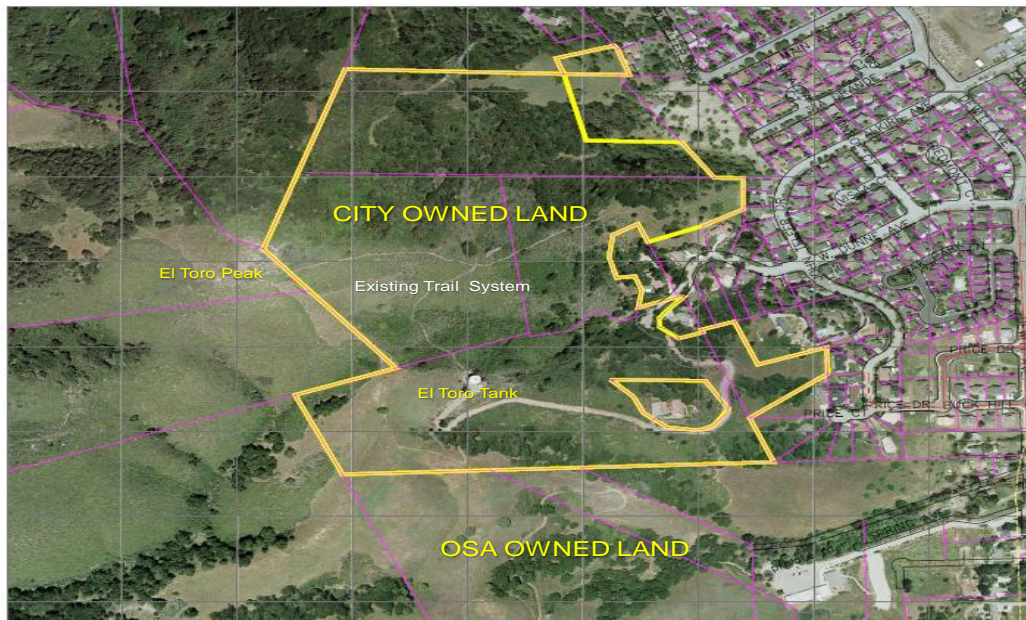
On January 15, 2013, March 19, 2013, and July 22, 2014, staff gave project updates to the Parks and Recreation Commission regarding the El Toro Trail project. The presentation and meeting minutes are available on the City's webpage, <http://www.morgan-hill.ca.gov/index.aspx?nid=1054> as well as other resources.

TRAIL PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Development and implement a community trail system on El Toro mountain consistent with the Trails and Natural Resources Study
- Develop a multi location access strategy that provides community access to El Toro mountain in a manner that provides for adequate amenities and respects neighborhood needs
- Involve the community in the decision making process, and address neighborhood concerns
- Partner with the Open Space Authority to acquire land, maintain the trail system, and provide environmental education programs.
- Design a comprehensive and effective safety and security plan that is fiscally sustainable
- Restore the existing vertical trails to a natural condition by planting native materials
- Develop a "Friends of El Toro Trail" community volunteer program to help patrol, maintain and keep the trail clean on a regular basis.

CITY OWNED LAND

The map below outlines the City owned property. The land is designated Open Space in the City's General Plan. The total acreage is approximately 60-70 acres.



ACCESS STRATEGY

The Access Strategy is designed to strategically identify trail access points to El Toro Mountain with the appropriate trail head amenities in a manner that makes the trail available to as many citizens as possible while not overly burdening any particular neighborhood. **The success of this strategy depends on both securing a primary trailhead with parking and neighborhood access points.**

This can be accomplished by:

1. Creating multiple trail access points, the number of users at each location will be minimized and therefore lessen the impact on the surrounding neighborhood in regards to noise and security. Multiple access points also allows for redundant access for emergency, maintenance and security purposes.
2. Creating one primary trail head for those coming from out of town or driving to enjoy the trail system and creating smaller, neighborhood trail heads
3. Focusing the location of a primary trailhead off of DeWitt Avenue, south of Spring Avenue. A primary trailhead should include parking spaces, restrooms, and information kiosks. This location should be designed to discourage parking on neighborhood streets.
4. Promoting the trail system as a healthy recreation alternative for the residents of Morgan Hill. Studies show that the presence of other trail users discourages undesirable behavior.
5. Creating one "recessed trailhead" to serve access points at Alkire, Via Grande and Main Avenue. The recessed trailhead will be set back from the neighboring streets and could contain a stretching apparatus and kiosk. This will reduce the risk of loitering at the end of residential streets.

6. Actively working with affected neighborhoods to create an access system that respects the privacy of those residents.
7. Taking advantage and promoting the use of existing public parking such as that found at City Hall/Library facilities. By directing parking away from the neighborhoods, traffic congestion and noise levels will remain low near the access points.
8. Striving to locate restroom facilities at the primary trailhead. Utilize restrooms at public facilities at the Civic Center and Library.
9. Design and implement a comprehensive trail sign program for parking, access points, and points of interest.
10. Considering emergency response as a factor for establishing trail heads. Multiple trail heads improves the response time for police and fire.
11. Establishing a "Friends of El Toro" volunteer program to help promote the proper use of the trails, to help create a safe environment for trail users, and to help keep the trails free of trash.
12. Actively work with the Open Space Authority to assist with trail maintenance, fauna and flora education and native species protection.

Staff has taken into consideration the valuable feedback received at multiple public meetings to create the proposed "Access Strategy". While not every concern can be mitigated, the overall plan is designed for the good of the entire community while respecting the privacy concerns of local neighborhoods. Ultimately, the "Access Strategy" should be presented to the City Council for consideration.

The Access Strategy would define each trail access point, provide for emergency access, and define trail amenities at each access location. In the long run, providing a trail to the summit of El Toro Mountain is equally important. The advantages of a trail system in close proximity to residents are; recreational health benefits, increased economic benefits, minimize existing undesirable behavior, and reduction in automotive travel to reach trailheads.



Access Strategy Summary

- **Primary Trailhead-DeWitt Avenue North of Spring Avenue site.** The focus of this location is to create an access point for those inclined to drive to a trail head, including out of town visitors. If possible, such a trail head should include convenient trail amenities such as vehicle parking, restrooms, trash receptacles, water station, bicycle racks, display kiosk, trail maps and signage. This trail head would also serve as emergency and maintenance access. This location in the south part of the City would serve the Open Space Authority well since it is near the property they own. The advantages of this access point are: providing an easy to locate trailhead, providing convenient parking and trail amenities, providing for emergency access, and lessening the impact on existing residential areas. This access point is located just outside of the City limits, in a rural setting, thereby preserving the tranquility of the existing neighborhoods.



Primary Trailhead Location

- Second Trailhead –Edmundson Tank site.** This alternate site could potentially be a secondary trailhead should a site closer to the trail system not be available. In addition, the Trails and Natural Resources Study shows a neighborhood trail connection to the homes behind the Community Park. Emergency and maintenance access would still be off of DeWitt Avenue. The advantages of this alternate access point are; access and parking for visitors, easy to locate trailhead and convenient trail amenities.



Alternate Primary Trailhead

- **Neighborhood access points.** These three access points are intended for use by local residents, provides north/south connectivity, and provides multiple loop trails. These access points are currently being used. Using three access points instead of one spreads out the trail users and thereby reduces the impacts to adjacent home owners. Directional signage could also be installed to divert visitors to the primary access point.

1. Dunne Avenue:

Mitigation measures include; trash receptacle, dog bag dispensers and measures to discourage visitors from parking on neighborhood streets. There is currently no parking at the end of Dunne Avenue. This access point also provides for multiple loop trails, northern connectivity, and serves as emergency and maintenance access. Advantages of this access point are; unique recreational and health opportunities for locals.



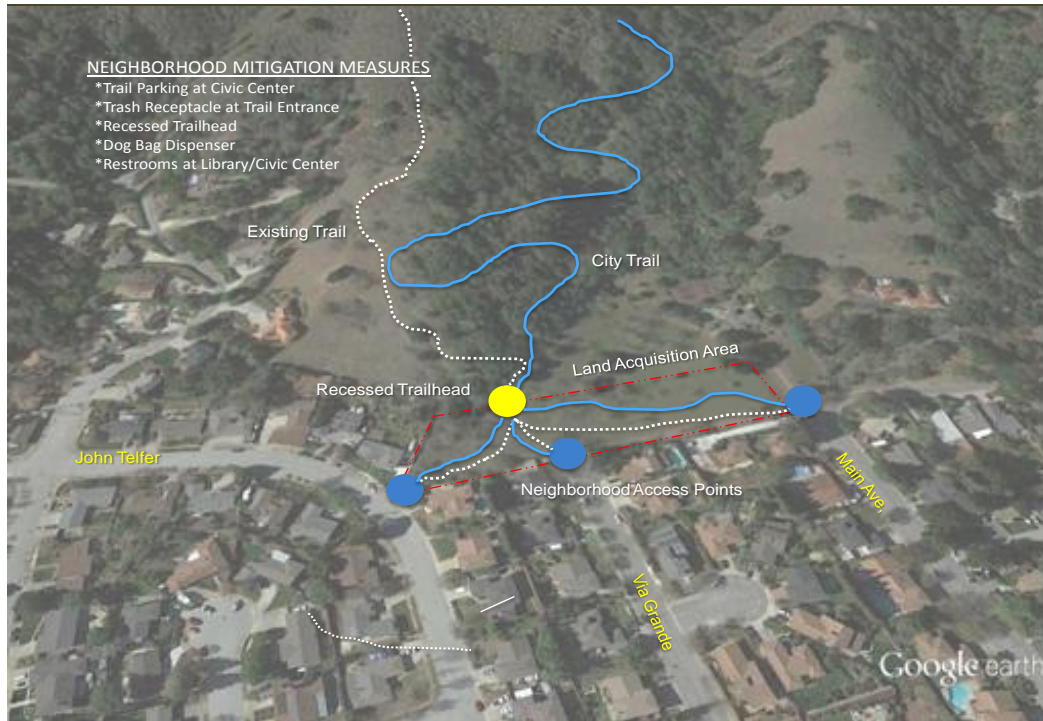
Dunne Avenue Access Point



Dunne Avenue Access Point

2. Alkire Avenue, Via Grande, and Main Avenue:

Mitigation measures include; trail user parking at library/City Hall/DSC and surrounding streets, shared recessed trailhead, trash receptacles, dog bag dispensers, restroom facilities located at Library and DSC when available. This trail segment is envisioned to be no more than 5 feet wide, so vehicle access would be limited. Advantages of this access point are; multiple access points to minimize resident impacts, unique recreational and healthy opportunities for locals.



Alkire, Via Grande & Main Access Points



Alkire Access Point



Via Grande Access Point

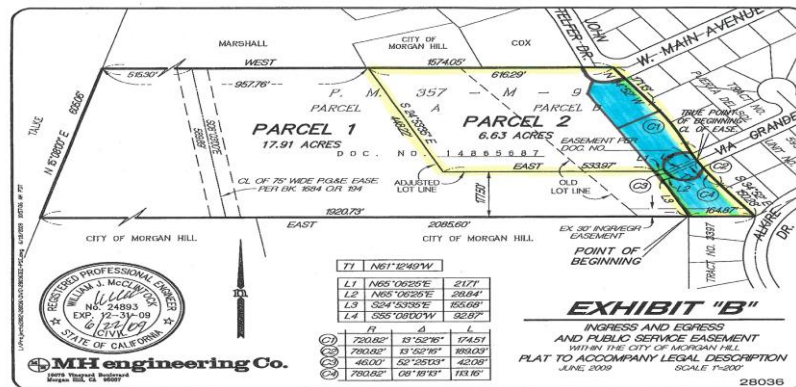


Main Avenue Access Point

In order for the City to provide access points for Alkire and Main avenues, the City would need to acquire land/easements, outlined in “red” on page 10 or “blue” on page 12. The City purchased Parcel 1, which included an easement through Parcel 2 for the Via Grande access point. If the City were not to acquire this land, it could be subdivided and developed in accordance with City residential development policies. Purchasing properties such as this for the expansion of open space lands and recreational uses will improve the success of the Access Strategy.

Acton Parcel Exhibit

Proposed Land Acquisition Area



Acton Parcel Exhibit

- Access to Peak of El Toro**

The City currently owns a large part of the east face of El Toro Mountain and a trail could be built within City owned property. However; staff recommends a longer, gradual slope trail to the top with fewer switchbacks for a more enjoyable trail experience. This will also preserve the face of El Toro Mountain by removing the existing informal trails. To ultimately gain access to the full summit area it will be necessary to acquire property as open space or as an access easement from private property owners. The City and the Open Space Authority have agreed to work together to pursue land purchase or easement rights necessary for a trail to the top if so directed by City Council. It must be pointed out that the City and the Open Space Authority only work with willing sellers.



Peak of El Toro Mountain

TRAIL HOURS AND TRAIL USERS

The City will work collaboratively with the Open Space Authority to establish trail hours and allowed uses. Trail hours for other Open Space Authority maintained areas are typically restricted to sunrise until ½ hour past sunset. The Open Space Authority typically allows for multi use trails, such as; pedestrians, equestrians, and bicyclists.

MAINTENANCE

The City is working with Open Space Authority to determine the most cost effective way to maintain the trail system. In addition, the City envisions a "Friends of El Toro" volunteer group to walk the trail system and collect trash along the trail corridor on a weekly basis. The Open Space Authority has also been successful with volunteer programs.

ON GOING TRAIL MONITORING

The City and the Open Space Authority will monitor trail use and make trail modifications as necessary for safety and security on a yearly basis. The City will continue to work with the community and impacted neighborhoods in order to address on-going issues.

SAFETY/SECURITY

The safety and security of trail users and surrounding neighborhood is paramount to the success of this project. The City (including its Police Department and Fire Department) is currently evaluating strategies to minimize the potential unsafe conditions. As part of the project design process, safety will be a significant factor. It is important to understand prior to project construction, the City is committed to ensuring that an effective safety plan is developed and ready for implementation.

More specifically, in addition to City and/or Open Space Authority staff monitoring, the City also envisions the aforementioned volunteer group to walk the trail periodically and report any suspicious activity to the local authorities. It is anticipated that both security and fire access would be provided at two locations; DeWitt/church site and end of Dunne Avenue.